

Message Text

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ACTION IO-14

INFO OCT-01 NEA-10 ISO-00 HA-05 AID-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00
PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01
SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 TRSE-00 SSM-03 /086 W
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R 221345Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7211
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
USLO RIYADH
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 1545

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: UNRWA, SREF, LE, IS, PLO
SUBJ: CIVILIAN REFUGEES AND CASUALTIES

1. BEGIN SUMMARY. ACCORDING TO UN SPECIAL REP JOHN SAUNDERS ON MARCH 21, NOBODY COULD YET MAKE ANY MEANINGFUL ESTIMATE OF THE TOTAL NUMBER OF CIVILIAN CASUALTIES IN SOUTH LEBANON. HE GUESSED THAT 100,000 LEBANESE AND UP TO 70,000 PALESTINIANS HAD FLED SOUTH LEBANON, BUT EMPHASIZED THAT THESE FIGURES WERE NOT FIRM. LOCAL UNRWA DIRECTOR ROBERT PREVOT SAID CASUALTIES AMONG PALESTINIAN CIVILIANS HAD BEEN VERY LIGHT. HE ESTIMATED THAT 67,000 TO 77,000 PALESTINIAN REFUGEES HAD BEEN DISPLACED. PREVOT BELIEVED THAT IF THE ISRAELIS LEFT, THE PLO WOULD FORCE THE PALESTINIAN REFUGEES TO RETURN TO SOUTH LEBANON. HE ALSO THOUGHT THE PLO WOULD CONTINUE FIGHTING EVEN AFTER THE INSERTION OF UN TROOPS. END SUMMARY.

2. IN CONVERSATION WITH EMBOFF ON MARCH 21, US SPECIAL REP
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JOHN SAUNDERS SAID THAT NOBODY COULD YET MAKE ANY MEANINGFUL ESTIMATES OF THE NUMBER OF CIVILIAN CASUALTIES IN SOUTH LEBANON. HE ADDED, HOWEVER, THAT BOTH WHO AND UNRWA HAD REPORTED THAT CIVILIAN CASUALTIES HAD BEEN "VERY LIGHT". SAUNDERS WAS UNWILLING TO MENTION A FIGURE. (LOCAL ICRC DIRECTOR CEDRICK NEUKOMM TOLD AID OFFICER ON MARCH 21 THAT THERE HAS BEEN A TOTAL OF ABOUT 400 PEOPLE KILLED AND 600 WOUNDED, INCLUDING LEBANESE

AND PALESTINIAN CIVILIANS AND FIGHTERS.)

3. SAUNDERS ALSO EMPHASIZED THERE WAS NO RELIABLE EVIDENCE ON HOW MANY REFUGEES HAD FLED THE SOUTH. HE GUESSED PERHAPS 100,000 LEBANESE AND 70,000 PALESTINIANS, BUT STRESSED THAT THESE FIGURES WERE NOT FIRM. SAUNDERS' DEPUTY, FERMAND SCHELLER, THOUGHT 100,000 WAS ALMOST CERTAINLY TOO HIGH.

4. IN CONVERSATION WITH EMBOFF SAME DAY, LOCAL UNRWA DIRECTOR ROBERT PREVOT SAID THERE HAD BEEN ALMOST NO CASUALTIES AMONG PALESTINIAN CIVILIANS. HIS STAFF HAD REPORTED ONLY ONE KILLED AND A FEW WOUNDED, BECAUSE ALL THE PALESTINIAN CIVILIANS HAD FLED THE AREA BEFORE THE ISRAELIS CAME. (UNRWA COMMISSIONER GENERAL THOMAS MCELHINEY TOLD THE AMBASSADOR ON MARCH 14 THAT PALESTINIAN REFUGEES HAD BEGUN FLEEING THE CAMPS IN THE TYRE AREA THE DAY AFTER THE MARCH 11 FATAH TERRORIST ATTACK IN ISRAEL.)

5. PREVOT COULD NOT PLACE A NUMBER ON HOW MANY CASUALTIES THERE HAD BEEN AMONG PALESTINIAN FIGHTERS, BUT GUESSED THAT THEY WERE "NOT HEAVY". EVEN IF THERE WERE 250 KILLED, AS CLAIMED BY THE ISRAELIS, THE PLO WOULD REGARD THIS NUMBER AS VIRTUALLY INSIGNIFICANT, HE BELIEVED.

6. PREVOT SAID HE HAD SOME FAIRLY ACURATE STATISTICS ON THE NUMBER OF CIVILIAN PALESTINIANS WHO HAD BEEN DISPLACED. HE
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PLACED THE TOTAL AT 67,000-77,000 AS FOLLOWS:

45,000 REGISTERED REFUGEES (OUT OF A TOTAL OF 50,000 REGISTERED REFUGEES) FROM THE TYRE AREA;

10,000 REGISTERED REFUGEES FROM DAMOUR, OR VIRTUALLY THE ENTIRE CIVILIAN POPULATION OF THE CITY;

2,000 REGISTERED REFUGEES FROM NABATIYAH;

10,000 TO 20,000 UNREGISTERED PALESTINIANS FROM VARIOUS PLACES IN SOUTH.

7. ABOUT 35,000 REGISTERED REFUGEES HAD GONE TO SIDON. ABOUT 6,000 REGISTERED REFUGEES HAD GONE TO BEIRUT: OF THESE ABOUT 4500 WERE IN SHATILA AND BURJ AL BURAJINAH CAMPS AND 1500 IN ILLEGALLY OCCUPIED APARTMENTS. THE PLO HAD MOVED 10,000 REGISTERED REFUGEES FROM DAMOUR TO A SPOT ABOUT 3 KM NORTH (BAL AN NAIMAH), AND ONLY FIGHTERS REMAINED IN DAMOUR. THE OTHER REGISTERED REFUGEES WERE SCATTERED THROUGHOUT VARIOUS LOCATIONS IN LEBANON. PREVOT SAID HE HAD NO FIGURES ON WHERE THE UNREGISTERED REFUGEES WENT.

8. PREVOT ALSO NOTED THAT ABOUT HALF OF THE 27,000 REGISTERED REFUGEES IN CAMPS IN THE SIDON AREA LEFT THE CAMPS DURING THE DAYTIME FOR FEAR OF ISRAELI AIRSTRIKES. THEY RETURNED TO THE CAMPS AT NIGHT, HOWEVER.

9. ALMOST ALL THE PALESTINIAN CIVILIANS IN SOUTH LEBANON HAD LEFT THE AREA, EXCEPT FOR "A FEW THOUSAND" REGISTERED LEBANESE REFUGEES LIVING ALONG THE BORDER. PREVOT SAID HE COULD NOT MAKE A MORE PRECISE ESTIMATE OF THE LATTER'S NUMBER.

10. IF THE ISRAELIS LEFT SOUTH LEBANON AND UN TROOPS WERE BROUGHT IN, THE PLO WOULD FORCE ALMOST ALL THE REFUGEES IN SIDON AND BEIRUT AND ELSEWHERE TO GO BACK TO TYRE AND CAMPS IN

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THE REGION, PREVOT SAID. THE PLO HAD DONE THIS AFTER THE ISRAELI ATTACK IN SEPT 1973, BECAUSE IT WANTED TO MAKE SURE THAT THERE WAS A CONTINUED PALESTINIAN PRESENCE IN SOUTH LEBANON.

11. IN PREVOT'S OPINION, THE ISRAELIS HAD FAILED TO DAMPEN THE SPIRIT OF THE PLO'S FIGHTERS. THEIR MORALE REMAINED HIGH AND THEY WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY CONTINUE FIGHTING, EVEN AFTER THE INSERTION OF UN TROOPS.

PARKER

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